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SUBJECT: SPAIN: MAY 21 EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY WITH CUBA

REF: A. STATE 51536

[1](#)B. MADRID 493 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)1. (U) In observance of the May 21 "Day of Solidarity with the Cuban People," conservative daily ABC published Ambassador Aguirre's aptly entitled op-ed "Solidarity with the Cuban People." The paper took heat in response from the Cuban Ambassador to Spain, who said in a letter to the editor May 22 that ABC once again "serves the U.S. empire in its anti-Cuban maneuvers." ABC's editorial board, defending its decision to publish Ambassador Aguirre's commentary, insisted the Cuban ambassador's "lack of arguments" were nothing new, and felt "honored by this diplomatic invective." All the Spanish dailies reported May 22 on President Bush's authorization to send cell phones to Cuba, with some calling the announcement "a small opening in the embargo."

[1](#)2. (U) At Post's suggestion, Mission contacts in the Cuban community posted their event in observance of the Day of Solidarity to the interactive world map on www.solidaridadcuba.org. Their ceremony, hosted by the Hispano-Cuban Foundation, featured a presentation by the Secretary General of the Federation of Cuban Associations (FECU) and honored three released political prisoners who arrived in Spain the weekend of February 17: Jose Gabriel Ramon Castillo, Omar Pernet, and Alejandro Gonzalez Raga.

[1](#)3. (SBU) These same Cuban dissidents were also invited to a coffee hosted by the Deputy Chief of Mission in observance of Cuban Solidarity Day for a number of their supporters the afternoon of May 21. The well attended session brought together a wide swathe of the Cuban community in Spain, human rights activists, two former political prisoners, journalists, an opposition leader, and a Spanish official. The spirited conversation went well over two hours. Invitees expressed universal appreciation to the U.S. Mission for hosting such an event.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The DCM opened the Solidarity Day discussion by reiterating the U.S. call for the release of all 240 Cuban prisoners of conscience. Subsequent interventions expressed solidarity with those prisoners. Carlos Paya, the Spanish representative of the Christian Liberation Movement and brother of dissident Osvaldo Paya, noted that just mentioning the name of a prisoner could be life-saving. Raul Rivero, in Madrid since 2006, and Alejandro Gonzalez Raga affirmed the importance of keeping the spotlight on all prisoners and spoke from their personal experiences about the powerful messages that diplomatic actions convey to those still behind bars. Gonzalez Raga described the perceived legitimization of the Cuban regime and the demoralizing impact on political prisoners of Spanish FM Moratinos's April 2007 visit to Havana. Several participants agreed there was no such thing

as an "ex-prisoner," noting those prisoners who had been released were immediately exiled to Spain and elsewhere and were, in effect, still imprisoned.

15. (SBU) Jaume Segura Socias, Assistant Deputy Director for Mexican, Central American, and Caribbean Affairs at the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, echoed the theme of solidarity and maintained the GOS had not forgotten Cuba's prisoners. Nonetheless, he reiterated the Spanish position that diplomatic relations are carried out with a government rather than with dissidents. He expressed optimism that things were changing for the better in Cuba, calling Castro's measures "small and modest, but advances." In a room full of would-be critics of Spanish policy toward Cuba, he fought hard for common ground while defending the importance of different approaches: "to each one a role to play." The self-styled spokeswoman for Cuban dissident groups, Elena Larrinaga, picked up on the unpopular theme, acknowledging "someone has to talk to (the Cuban government)." Though it was an opportunity for many to air their differences in terms of approaching the Cuban government, in the end attendees shared common ground in their expressions of solidarity with the Cuban people and their concerns over the plight of political prisoners. The forum also provided a good lead-in to the Spanish Cuban community's participation in upcoming events in Brussels the week of May 26 and in preparation for the EU's review of the suspended restrictive measures.

Aguirre